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ABSTRACT

Career portfolios can help beginning teachers land their first job and facilitate a teacher's professional growth as they develop in their career. A portfolio in this context is a collection of print, pictorial, and audio and video data that documents the candidate's experiences and training. Early in training, prospective teachers should decide on a portfolio format, begin to gather materials, and select documents with a purpose. A portfolio should illustrate the candidate as a multifaceted and creative teacher. Students must be a central feature of the portfolios with the materials portraying the candidates interacting with children in a broad spectrum of activities. Research indicates that teacher candidates with portfolio materials have a strong advantage in the job application process. They allow the candidate to display much more information about themselves than the routine application documents and credential files permit. Portfolios should include such items as videotapes of the candidate teaching, lesson plans, sample lessons, samples of student work, special events and commendations, statement of interests and aspirations, and documentation of work with children outside school. Portfolios should be well tabbed for easy retrieval and clearly labeled. Review by cooperating teachers or university supervisors will improve the product. In addition, a portfolio is never finished as it should be updated throughout a teacher's career. (JB)

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Career Portfolios:

Helping Beginning Teachers

Help Themselves

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Abstract

Career portfolios are tools to help beginning teachers attain professional positions. Moreover, they become facilitators of the teacher's professional growth as they are developed during a career. A well prepared career portfolio has much to say about a candidate and should be carefully prepared.

"Hello. This is Deborah." It was one of my intern teachers from the previous term calling. "I wanted you to know that I got that fourth-grade job that I applied for and that my portfolio was one of the main reasons that I got it." Just a few days later Marilyn stopped at my office as aid virtually the same thing. Both of them claimed that their portfolios had been a key factor in attaining a job. Heather wrote a letter after she obtained her first teaching position: I got a job in the Ferndale School District. I am teaching ninth grade physical science and tenth grade biology. I believe that the portfolio played a big role in helping me land the job."

All of my interns had rated the portfolios as an excellent idea and had recommended that future interns create one as part of their preparation for a job search. But hearing the enthusiastic statements from these newly hired teachers drove the point home. Nine additional teachers who had recently completed our teaching preparation programs attributed success in obtaining their first position to their portfolios. Several others said that the portfolios had been very helpful in the interview process.

Most beginning teachers enter their careers with little documentation of their skills and training. They arrange to have their transcripts sent with placement file and walk into the interview with a smile. Musicians take their instruments to an interview, artists take a portfolio of their art work, the experienced teacher takes a set of references from on-the-job observations. Yet what do beginning teachers think that they have to take? I have heard many beginning teachers respond to questions about teaching by saying: "If I were a teacher I would . . ." The interviewer would prefer to hear: "This is what I did when . . ." Better still the interviewer would like to see evidence of what the candidate has done such as samples of student work, pictures of the candidate in action, or model lessons and lesson plans prepared by the candidate. What can beginning teachers do to more effectively bring their expertise into the interview process? One answer is to create a career portfolio.

Definitions

A portfolio is defined by Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991) as "a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas" (p. 60). The Pacific Northwest College of Art (cited in Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer, 1991) defines an application portfolio in art as

"a visual representation of who you are as an artist, your history as well as what you are currently doing . . . It is representing you when you're not present." (p. 61).

Portfolios that are used to obtain a position have labeled credential portfolios, employability portfolios, and interviewing portfolios. Credential portfolios are defined by Weinberger and Didham (1987) as "an individualized portrait of educational, professional, and relevant personal achievements" (p. 6). The implied definition of employability portfolios and interviewing portfolios in the works cited in this article is that of a collection of data about a candidate that is used in the process of seeking professional employment.

What is a career portfolio? A *career portfolio* is a collection of print, pictures, audio and video data that documents the candidate's experiences, training, and aspirations. It is designed to assist in obtaining a professional position and achieving professional advancement throughout a career. Career portfolios provide opportunities for continuous documentation of accomplishments enhancing professional growth.

Early beginning of a portfolio

The most common error in creating a career portfolio is not beginning soon enough. If the candidate waits until the interview process is about to begin it is impossible to gather materials from pre-student teaching experiences. Student work, photographs, video taping, audio taping, sample lessons, lesson plans, letters of commendation, and other documents should be gathered and preserved during the time of the experiences.

In addition to gathering the materials it is important to decide upon a format early in the process and then design the materials to fit the format whenever possible. A neat and well organized package speaks well of the candidate while a disorganized portfolio can carry a very negative connotation. The best organized packages are photo albums with practice pockets and small, boxes with taping dividers. The practice pockets of the photo album allow for easy reorganization and viewing from two sides which reduces the bulk. The boxes work well for candidates who wish to bring in tapes of their work and three-dimensional samples. The important points are (1) start early, pre-student teaching field experiences are not too early to begin gathering materials (2) choose a format as soon as possible and design components to fit the format (3) select the documents with a purpose.

Creation of a career portfolio

A career portfolio documents the candidate's experiences, abilities, and interests that cannot be easily documented in other ways. It is important that the portfolio include a variety of materials to create interest and illustrate the candidate as a multifaceted and creative teacher. Careful selection of materials is critical. Adams and Hamm (1992) emphasize that to portfolio should be a representation of carefully selected student accomplishments. The selections will speak for the candidate's values and insights as well as his or her accomplishments.

Students must be a central feature of the portfolios with the materials portraying the candidates interacting with children in a broad spectrum of activities. The best photographs are those that are "close in" action shots of the candidate and children enthusiastically pursuing learning. A few photographs may document bulletin boards and student work. Actual pieces of student work are sometimes difficult for the intern to obtain, but students may be willing to make a second copy if they will not part with an original.

Utility

The usefulness of portfolios as interviewing tools was studied by Smolen and Newman (1992). They found that 50 of 61 respondents who interviewed teacher candidates were willing to look at a candidates portfolio, 10 others were possibly willing, and 1 was unwilling to do so. They also found that personnel directors were the least willing to look at portfolios while principals were the administrators most interested in a candidate's portfolio. Mathies and Uphoff (1992) reported that employers from the K-12 sector feel the quality of their personnel decisions is enhanced when additional documentation such as a portfolio is available to them. School representatives who had interviewed prospective teachers at Bowling Green State University were surveyed by Weinberger and Didham (1987) concerning the use of portfolios in the interview process. Continuing the portfolio requirement at Bowling Green State University was recommended by 83% of the respondents although many respondents complained that there was too little time in the interview "to really look at it."

As a principal and later an associate superintendent the author interviewed over seven hundred teacher candidates in a sixteen year period. Very few of these candidates furnished any materials other than an application and those documents

that were found in a traditional credential file. In all cases those candidates who brought materials such as photographs, video tapes, samples of student work, model lesson plans, etc. had an opportunity to share them with the interviewers. In many cases they were commented upon favorably by members of the interviewing teams and strengthened the candidacy of the interviewees.

What should be in a career portfolio?

Portfolio items that provide richer and more accurate descriptions of teaching skills and abilities were found to be more useful Dorminey and Kahlich (1993). They also found that videotapes of teaching performance were considered as "most useful" when making employment decision by 201 administrators in Georgia. The authors concluded that "portfolios would be better and more useful tools for making employment decisions that traditional credential files" (p. 6).

Most interviewers would like to see that the candidate write a quality lesson plan. The candidate would be wise to include some of the latest teaching methods as well as demonstrate the candidate's ability to integrate current research and innovative ideas into teaching.

Video tapes provide a marvelous medium for portraying what the candidate has done in the classroom. They should be of short duration and focus on one or two instructional practices. Ten minutes is about the maximum amount of time that interviewers will allow for the viewing of a tape so a compact lesson is appropriate.

The design of the portfolio should be inclusive, yet flexible. Intern teachers working with me added and deleted components to customize the career portfolio for each interview. This is corroborated by Williamson and Abel (1989) who concluded that "beginning teachers should tailor their portfolio to the specific level at which they wish to teach as administrators at different building levels and at the district office view items in the portfolio differently" (p. 7). Smolen and Newman (1992) found that principals were in hard evidence of classroom skills, such as lesson plans, tests, classroom mana6gement, student discipline statements and computer skills while central office administrators were more interested in recommendations of other professionals.

The intern teachers that I have worked with who developed career portfolios

have recommended that each career portfolio include the following:

1. A well organized, attractive folder other container
2. A table of contents
3. Model lesson plans
4. Sample lessons
5. Photographs of the intern teacher with children engaged in interesting activities
6. Samples of student work
7. Special events and commendations
8. A brief statement of the candidate's professional interests and aspirations
9. Documentation of work with children outside of the school setting

Mathies and Uphoff (1992) recommend that an "Executive Summary" of the portfolio be provided prior to interviews to make use of the portfolios during interviewing more effective.

Organizing the portfolio

The career portfolio should be well tabbed for easy retrieval of documentation and well labeled so that its user will clearly understand the main point which is being made by the documentation. It is unlikely that interviewers will take much of a forty-five minute interview to look at the portfolio. The candidate will want to focus on specific sections. The candidate may turn to the science section and say, "When I was teaching a unit on the solar system to my fourth grade students this is what we did."

It is very important that the portfolio is self-explanatory in case there is not time use it during the interview. The portfolio must communicate well for the candidate in her or his absence. A table of contents, page numbers, color tabs, and a meaningful sequence by chronology, disciplines, or activities all make the portfolio "user friendly." When the user has completed reading the portfolio his or her opinion of the candidate should be enhanced or the portfolio has not done its job.

Fine tuning the portfolio

A review of the portfolio by cooperating teachers and university supervisors will improve the product. If it is possible, a joint review of the portfolio by a principal and the intern teacher will simulate the interview process as well as fine tune the portfolio. Sharing the portfolio with other intern teachers will generate further ideas for improvement.

The portfolio is never finished. It can be updated throughout the candidate's career and be maintained as a tool for future employment or promotion. Furthermore, the development of a portfolio facilitates professional growth through reflective thinking and provides a means for documenting an individual's growth as a teacher. The objective is to maintain a living document of professional career in education.

Conclusion

A career portfolio is a presentation of a professional experiences that helps predict the potential for future performance. Assembling the portfolio will help a candidate reflect on what has been accomplished in the past and how to best present that in an interview. It can be used to enhance the interview process and consequently assist in job placement. The career portfolio will not land a position by itself no more than will good references, a high grade point average, or a well prepared placement package, but it may lead to telephone call that begins, "I wanted you to know that I got that teaching position I interviewed for."

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